

THE VASHON LOOP

Vol. 23, #07

SERVING VASHON AND ITS NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES ~ FREE

July 7, 2026

Legends of Vashon

Buried Treasure, Part 1

By Marc J. Elzenbeck

There are good reasons to bury treasure. Fear of discovery and theft is well-founded, transport risk is real, and it is wise to avoid temptable natures. Love isn't known to top the list, but it might be the oldest reason and the best. A love story is why Vashon has been subject to treasure hunts for gold since the late 1800s.

Juicy particulars aren't recorded, but there are clues. For the first two decades after November 13th, 1851, when Dave Denny told his brother Arthur's party of two dozen – just ashore on Alki Beach – “I wish you hadn't come,” Tacoma and Seattle were little more than muddy lumber mills with big plans. Each consumed most of the nearby labor and timbers, sending off coveted Doug Fir for bridge spans, beams, ship masts, and spars, and cedar lumber and shingles.

When the Northern Pacific railroad cut its way to Tacoma in 1873, a young Norwegian logger named Lars-Jan Hansen likely arrived with it. He would have had the saved wages, time, and inclination to scout the area. Like many fellow Scandinavians in his construction

Continued on Page 3



With Wand and Shawl: The Investiture of Vashon's New Co-Poets Laureate

By Jane Valencia

On Summer Solstice Eve, poets and poetry lovers gathered from the Island and across the water to celebrate our new poets laureate, Iris Spring and C. Hunter Davis.

The event took place at the Open Space for the Arts & Community, which now shepherds Vashon's Poet Laureate program. Initiated in 2011, with Ann Spiers as our first poet laureate, the O Space explains that “the program honors a local poet who serves as a creative ambassador for Vashon, using language to illuminate, connect, and inspire.”

This term, we have two such poets!

The glass overhead door was rolled open to the evening, the wooded area beyond, and an occasional light rain. Margaret Roncone, poet laureate from 2023-2025, passed on a “magic” wand

to Iris (who was there with her six-week-old baby) and a shawl to Hunter – items that had been given to her when she became poet laureate. Margaret, Iris, and Hunter shared poetry, followed by a few other poets in this fully attended event. Poetry is alive and well on Vashon!

Margaret Roncone wrote to me later about her term. “My ceremony was held in Dig Deep's greenhouse and was quite lovely. Hunter baked four beautiful cakes! At that point in time, previous poet laureates came up with a list and chose the next laureate.”

Laureates determined for themselves how they wished to encourage the love of poetry and the writing of it on the Island. “I established the current open mic at the Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Museum, previously held at the Coop, and also the ‘Little Library for poetry’ in front of the Vashon Presbyterian Church.” She also established and facilitates two poetry-related activities, “Wordplay” at the Vashon Senior Center and “Parchment and Pen” at Women Hold the Key. Thank you, Margaret, for contributing so much to a vibrant love of words and poetry on Vashon.

We look forward to getting to know Iris and Hunter, and what their poets-laureateship inspire, and to sharing their work in The Loop.

Enjoy some summer poetry: a poem (to left) by one of our new poets laureate, as well as two other poems read that evening, as well as a poem by one of our new poets laureate.

Continued on Back Page

Mahadasha Cycles in Vedic Astrology

By Melanie Farmer

If there were an ancient system that offered specific guidance for each stage of your life, would you want to know more about it? In Vedic astrology, this system exists, and it is known as the Mahadasha cycle.

What Is a Mahadasha?

In Vedic astrology, or Jyotish, Mahadasha is a major planetary period that lasts for a set number of years and is believed to shape the broad direction of a person's inner and outer life. Together, the nine Mahadashas form a fixed 120-year cycle, traditionally regarded as representing the full potential span of a human life.

Each Mahadasha is ruled by one of the nine grahas used in Vedic astrology: Ketu, Venus, Sun, Moon, Mars, Rahu, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mercury. While seven of these correspond to familiar celestial bodies, Rahu and Ketu are invisible lunar nodes that symbolize the points where eclipses occur; they are regarded as powerful influences in Vedic astrology.

During its period, the ruling graha becomes a spiritual teacher, activating the houses, signs, and karmic themes connected to it in the natal chart.

Although the Mahadashas always unfold in the same order, each individual enters the cycle at a different point based on the position of the Moon at their birth.

Mahadasha cycles are understood as sacred timing patterns that reveal the unfolding of karma through different seasons of life. While the birth chart describes the soul's underlying blueprint, the dasha system shows when certain lessons, opportunities, and challenges become active.

Continued on Page 11

Before the Great Yawn of July

By C. Hunter Davis, Vashon Poet Laureate

Before the great yawn of July,
night spins into barely nothing
confusing the barred youth owl
who takes to everlasting day
with steam shovel energy he
approaches our house garden
dizzy with spring fecundity
plant and bird and frog and tree
and weed and lilac and 13-year-olds
and Cocker Spaniel and 95-year-olds
batching, matching, hatching
especially towhees, robins, wrens and juncos
until our house houses mud/stick houses
at every possible place. The fledglings throat
practice and practice.



Youthful barred, hungrier than professional soccer
players, fearless as a toad, he devours
every single life
every single nest
every single grown and growing
every single one.



Vashon Rules of the Road

- Whether driving or biking –
“twenty is plenty!”*



* 20 mph

Time to Sell Your House? Need Some Free Advice?

By Bernie O’Malley

This year has been a good opportunity to buy and sell houses on Vashon-Maury Islands. And there’s at least 3 more months of “selling season” left to dive in as a seller than a buyer. And I’m told there are about 45 trained Island real estate agents standing by to help with both decisions.

Some will tell you it’s “Easy-peasy” to step out with the old, step into the new. Today I’ll offer some free advice based on our lessons learned with a few housing trades we’ve made during the COVID-crazy world these last seven years.

First let’s start with a review of those seven years of Island real estate. I won’t dwell on the worldwide events we all experienced as citizens. Living with COVID, mortgage interest rates from 3-7%, and two federal elections kept us all very busy emotionally sometimes. But the need to live someplace under a roof with utilities didn’t change for 98% of us Islanders. And every year, a few hundred of us take the plunge.

Let’s focus on the Island market’s history of buying and selling. For starters, 2019 was an ordinary sales year, not much for sale over a million bucks, lotsa choices, mostly affordable mortgage rates. Fondly remembered as totally ordinary!

Then came 2020-2022 as a “sellers” market, when prices kept increasing, buying low and selling higher was crazy easy and 4% interest rates helped, too. What a hurricane. Then came 2023-

2024, which marked a change in both buyers’ and sellers’ attitudes, when caution about prices dominated, price reductions became almost the rule to get a sale.

Caution got worsen in 2025: a very slow-paced and difficult market marked by more price confusion and DOM – “days on market.” Even crazier was the proportion – 50% – of houses priced over one million dollars.

Then comes 2026 as a boom year, beginning in late January. Almost everything sold for asking, often in a few short weeks, despite the chaos of Trumpian adventures, actual wars, \$6 gasoline, and near 7% interest rates. Few sellers or sellers [Andy–should one of these be “buyers”?] could follow this situation. Real estate agencies reigned with confidence, even when perhaps no one really knew the answers to “tomorrow.”

All that said, here comes the free advice. The path we followed outlines what we actually did in the last 5 years post-COVID buying/selling our own residences. If it looks like boring and tedious work, this list describes the myriad challenges we call W’s. [W’s? I don’t understand what this means?]

We didn’t invent this process. It’s used by many buyers and sellers. We found it emotionally calming when faced with all the small and large decisions buyers and sellers are asked to make.

There’s probably a few more, but these seven questions fill the concept well. Buying and selling a home is a life changing experience for all:

To which of the 45 Island agents do we give the listing? What’s our criteria: newer or older on the job; the agents response to what’s asked for:

estimated DOM, how many Open Houses or none, duration of listing contract, naturally charming, or somewhat all-business aloof?

Who picks the price, you or the agent? How does that price match today’s market advantages. Island prices still are a few barely under \$1 million – lotsa choices over \$1 million?

Will our sale provide enough cash after paying selling real estate fees of about 10%, any remaining mortgage(s), and moving expenses of \$3,000 to \$12,000?

Where are we going to move to; are there houses there we like better and for sale, here, there, anywhere we like?

What can we afford on a new living space? A new mortgage at 7% and what’s the actual payment going to be? What’s the priorities on something new: more or less living space, commutes, garden space, kids’ schools? What about “fixers,” and who does the fixins’?

When are we confident our sale will close successfully, allowing us to pick and buy a new house? Mortgage lenders can be demanding for documentation of your potential buyers’ assertions. Weeks are required for that process to be completed, whether successful or failed.

Why do we need a back-up plan? Sometimes the new house we want sells before we are ready with our buyer’s cash. Something called “bridge loans” are available in some cases to provide the your cash, typically just short-terms; they require good credit and lenders’ review of your buyer’s application for likely being able to meet closing requirements. Another option is rentals, though always in short supply and often as expensive as a mortgage.

Just a reminder: I used the word “we” because most sellers are partners of some description, children often need to offer acceptance of the priorities, “house” since the Vashon Maury market is mostly what’s on sale, and yes, prices are way too high for most singles to manage.

Well, that’s all we got today, folks. Hopefully not too boring an exercise, maybe even useful to your adventures. Best wishes for success and happiness with your choices.

Tires Redux

By Rich Osborne

Hey, Vashon, it’s summer! Time to relax for a moment and enjoy our victory. To remember all the Coho Salmon we just saved. Not to pretend that we are done, but to smile over a glass of something and look forward to next year.

I’m talking beach tires, of course. In 2025 we took 127 tires off our beaches. We set a 2026 goal of more tires than 2025. (Hey! We’re Rotarians, it’s what we do.)

By our most recent count, I am so proud to announce that we removed 147 beach tires in 2026! Yay! Yay us! Well done, Vashon! And six of these were monster-huge truck or tractor tires weighing up to 500 lbs each. As one of the tire removers, I can assure you that these should each count as 10 or 20 regular tires. That would take us even higher, but who’s counting? I mean who other than me.

But I digress.

Kudos again to Vashon Rotary Club, Zero Waste Vashon, The Harbor School (who sent students to work with us), King County Solid Waste (who have commissioned “The Friends of the Trail” to transport the tires to Liberty Recycling in Puyallup), Vashon Parks Department and Vashon Rowing Club, (who hosted the beach tire staging area at Jensen Point), Vashon Land Trust, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (who sent a boat and four workers to help with the big tires), the Vashon Beachcomber, Engels Towing, and all of the

neighborhood groups and individuals who volunteered their time, their tow trucks, their muscles, and their sweat and extreme attention to detail that made this project so successful and impactful by removing toxins from our fragile ecosystems.

I have a question. Does anyone else drive by a beach where a particularly difficult tire was pulled out and smile from a residual adrenaline rush of accomplishment? Maybe it’s just me.

Anyway, thanks everybody! Let’s do it again next year. In fact, you can help us now by finding tires for us to clear next year. The spring and summer are the best times during daylight low tides to locate half-buried tires in the intertidal zone. So as you walk your favorite Vashon-Maury beaches, remember to take your phone, and to keep your eyes peeled to let us know about your discoveries. And don’t forget, this program only deals with beach tires.

The best way to document latitude/longitude locations for iPhotos is to have location turned on and then the picture can be opened in the Photos Map view and it will show up on a map.

Also, when sending a tire geolocation, send it as an email, not as a text (as the texting strips out details that we need). vashonrotaryclub.org or steven.bergman@zerowastevashon.org

Again, thanks Vashon, you rock!

The Vashon Loop is published monthly



Vashon! The DSHS Van will be here



Wednesday, July 15th and August 12th 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

At the Vashon Food Bank / Methodist Church 17928 Vashon Hwy SW

Thursday, July 13th 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

At the Presbyterian Church 17708 Vashon Hwy SW

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You can also apply for food stamps and the ORCA Lift reduced fare program

The Vashon Loop

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Buried Treasure

Continued from Front Page

crew, he had a natural fondness for fjords, plus some awareness of the 1864 Homestead Act.

Soon after the railroads, Vashon Island started to serve as a whistle stop between the ambitious competitors to its north and south, with floating docks, steamer villages, and post offices springing up all along its coastlines. Vashon's old-growth trees were still untouched, many reaching over 300 feet high, standing on trunks 12 feet across.

But for a few primeval streams as pathways to a dark interior, crossing Vashon by foot or horse was practically impossible. Whereas rowing, sailing, or steaming around it was easy, with a wide outer harbor opening due south, connected to a hidden, glacier-carved inner sanctuary. The interior lagoons and the relatively low banks of what we call Burton made for natural landings for canoes, dinghys, and skiffs.

When Lars Hansen saw Vashon, he resolved to visit. When he did, he probably touched in at Judd Creek's outlet, visiting with natives who lived there. If there were better places for a skilled logger, they were half a world

away. Lars could turn north and south and see ports with lumber mills; he could look behind and see over a billion board-feet of thick timber perfectly placed between, with connected water transport.

He must have laughed with joy and awe at the scale of the opportunity, considered the required tools, what to build first, and who to hire on as crew.

We don't know exactly when or where Lars Hansen met a native Indian girl named Katherine M., nor by what authority they married. We do know that he loved her, was logging on the Burton peninsula by 1877, and entrusted Katherine with \$800 in gold. There was no bank to hold it. He told her to bury it in a secret spot where only she would know.

In those days, \$20 Liberty coins were a normal means of saving, not used for daily items, but sometimes traded for land or business purchases. This would have been a symmetrical four stacks of ten coins, making a nice three-pound square of 40. Depending on condition, today each coin would reach up to \$10,000 at auction.

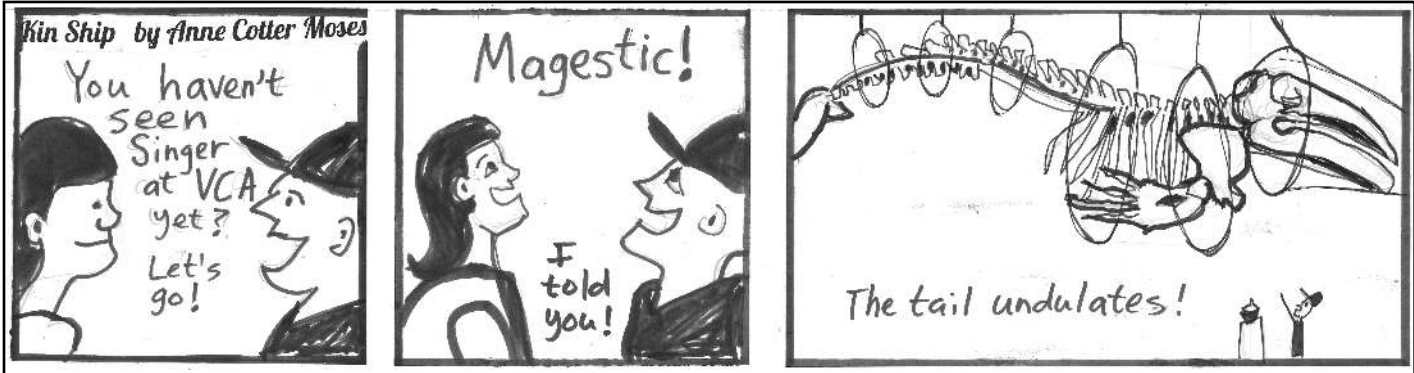


passed down first-hand through settler families, that she never revealed the treasure's location, not even to Lars.

Due to the time the Hansens spent together on Judd Creek, locals have long suspected the cache is buried somewhere along it. While its value is only about the total of a modest house, generations of boys have walked along, searching from Paradise Valley on down, digging and prodding without reported success. A few are known by this author.

Modern techniques might prove effective in finding this treasure, but it's a big area and a small target. Besides, there is a much bigger treasure, in both size and value. We'll get to that in a future issue.

Lars Hansen went on to prosper and to eventually own much of Burton. While it may seem implausible that he really didn't learn the location, some familiarity with sickness and grief make it less so. The couple may well have hoped or assumed she would recover, only for Katherine to fall into a fevered coma and pass away. Lars may have been absent while she was still coherent. Or, facing greater matters, they may have simply chosen to treasure their last moments together.



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Correction
In our June issue, Claudia Hollander-Lucas' name was left off of the contributor's list. We apologize for the error.

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“Rebel With a Clause”
At Vashon Theatre
Monday, July 20th at 7:00 p.m.

Starring grammar guru Ellen Jovin and directed by her husband Brandt Johnson, *Rebel with a Clause* demonstrates that comma fights can bring us closer together in a divided time.

Excitingly, Ellen and Brandt will be in attendance! Ellen will set up her Grammar Table at the theater by 6:00 p.m., so come early to get your grammar debates resolved!

After the movie, you can stick around for a Q&A with Brandt and Ellen, followed by a book signing.

Tickets here: <https://vashontheatre.com/production/rebel-with-a-clause>

**Give all the
power to the
many, they will
oppress the few.**

**Give all the
power to the
few, they will
oppress the many.**

— Alexander Hamilton —

On the Road to Recovery

By Gates (Pam) Johnson

Surgery is in the rear-view mirror. It happened on May 28th, starting at 8:30 in the morning. Of course, I was asleep by then.

The trip to the hospital was fine (one thousand thank yous, Sarah). Check in and wait wasn't bad. Then back to the "staging area": gown up, install the first of three IV lines, and off to the races.

Sometime the next morning, I awoke to about three hands down my throat, removing a breathing tube. Not fun to gag and retch with that many hands and apparati (apparatuses?) down my windpipe.

After the removal, it was decided I could breathe on my own, so that seemed like a good time to open my eyes. The time between removal and eye opening could have been seconds or an hour. I will never know. What I do know is when I opened my eyes, there was a man standing next to my bed talking to me.

I listened for a minute, then said "Who are you?" Turns out it was my nephew Paul, who lived with me a lot of the time when he was a kid and who now lives with his wife here on my property. And I didn't recognize him! Paul stayed with me through many nurse and doctor visits and for that I am eternally grateful.

I must have been a sight. There are a few pictures of me while in the ICU for the first four days. Just for a drill, here is the numerical countdown: three IV lines, three drains, one feeding tube down my nose (in for a week), one breathing tube (quickly removed), one catheter replaced with PureWick, four ICU days and four additional days in the hospital, and one incision from my left ear, under my chin, to halfway up to the right side of my chin.

I knew that there was going to be a bone graft and was told they could take it from my scapula or my leg. I chose scapula. Perhaps not my smartest decision. So, there is a big incision on my left shoulder and the drain for that was in my armpit. Turns out, almost three weeks post-surgery, that shoulder incision is the most painful. Still can't use my arm without pain.



Healing Can Happen

By Deborah H. Anderson

Warning: sensitive material, descriptions of violent abuse and suicide.

The first year of our marriage he strangled me. His hands around my neck, his face filled with rage, I steelled myself against his attack and declared, "Take your hands off me, and if you ever touch me again (in a violent way) I will leave you."

He dropped his hands, and for the next 18 years mastered the art of manipulative abuse and exploitation that doesn't leave marks.

That question, "Why don't women just leave?" I had little sense of agency and less voice. I have no idea how I came to speak that declaration to him, except to say it was the place I grew into over time.

And how can there be abuse that doesn't leave marks? I'll give you this example. Every single time we got in the car, he would ask me, "How do you think we should go?" I would share my idea, and every single time he would say "Nah, I think we should go (thus and so) way."

My consciousness and sense of self was very low. In my childhood, I had been taught that evil was good and if I thought any other thing, I was crazy.

But the day came when a professional certification process required I have a complete psychological workup that included taking the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. In the trade, the psych world, it is known as an infallible instrument. That means you can't fake it. If you have issues, that test will find them.

My results came back, and incredulously I heard the psychiatrist say, "This is one of the most balanced results I have ever seen. Do you know you

Island Voices



I had the most incredible nursing team while in the ICU. One young nurse would come in, sit and chat for a long time. We talked about food a lot, and he told me how to make homemade tortillas. I remember his name was Victor.

The night nurse was a young woman who told me about growing up on the Flathead Reservation in Montana. She gave me her contact information and wants to come over to check out Vashon. Haven't called her yet, but I will.

Once in the regular hospital room, I had another stellar nurse. He was tall and handsome and had the most beautiful baritone voice. I said, "You must be a wonderful singer." His reply was he couldn't sing a note. Turns out his passion is art. I asked what his preferred medium is and he said tattooing. Of course. I then had to show him my tattoo. He said the artist did a good job, nice, even lines.

We talked a bit and I told him that, when this health trip was done, I wanted to get another tattoo, an Easter Island Moai. Asked if he could do it and he said yes. I might try to find him and see if



we can set something up.

Had quite a few visitors. It was so nice to see familiar faces. My son is pretty hospital-phobic. Before surgery, I bet him \$800 that he wouldn't come see me. Well, he did! And he doesn't plan on collecting on the bet. He even picked me up when I was discharged.

My daughter came up, brought me Pho broth and vacuumed and stuff. Niece and nephew were here to help out with everything from watering the garden, to groceries, to laundry. One good friend painted me a picture of a UFO beaming up a cow, just like my tattoo. The nurses hoped I would forget to take it home as it really brightened up my room. I did remember to take it home.

Friends brought me food and an orchid and cards and good wishes. Lots of texts and phone calls from New York to Oregon to here. It truly does take a village.

Been home a week and a half now. A little drainage hole set-back, but it's all good. Transitioning from a liquid diet to soft foods. My niece and nephew told me that, when they visited me in the ICU, I was mostly interested in where they were going for dinner. One of the high points of a recent doctor's visit was when I was told I could eat mashed potatoes!

I will have to wait a few months before I can have that big rib-eye steak. But I am eating a little, drinking an amount of water, and sleeping a lot. Guess that's what it takes to heal. I feel alert and good enough to drive but am not ready for anyone except a few to see me.

My jaw is huge and could take three months for the swelling to subside. The doc said if the swelling doesn't go down, I might get myself a free face-lift. I hope it returns to normal, as another surgery does not seem fun right now.

Oh, the cancer wasn't quite as widespread as they thought it might be. The bone graft was pretty big. The stitches are starting to dissolve. I have to see my oncologist to find out the next steps. Last time we talked, he thought immunotherapy every six weeks for the next year and hopefully no radiation or chemo.

My sense of humor was not removed and discarded. For the time being I will refer to myself as:

The Giant Freckled Chipmunk.

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Third, I kept doing what good I could. Did being demonized wear me down? Absolutely. I had that moment for about five seconds when I considered suicide. Then I found that voice again and said, "I will not let this Island kill me."

I learned to ask for help and to receive it. I tried to keep my children free from the constraints of poverty as best I could. I also came to understand the worst in people. I refused to argue with evil. I also came to understand the breadth and depth of addiction and childhood trauma on a community.

Lastly, I asked myself the question I asked classes I had taught on healing: "Who would you be if you hadn't been abused? Be that person."

Healing is complicated and hard work. Three years ago, when my ex unexpectedly died after a first round of chemo, I was instantly free. These last years, I have completed the healing process and am now enjoying the fruits of all the labor, all the introspection, all the changes required to be strong in who I am and what I can do.

Yes, you can heal. You can. You can. You can.

Magnificent Ruins

Part One: Alexander’s Field

By Richard Odell

“People seem, but things are.”
Rainer Rilke

It all went back to the war. My parents’ eastern Washington origins were always somewhat murky, to me. More often, when they spoke of past times, they referred to their days at High Point, a war-time housing development in southwest Seattle, built for the city’s burgeoning ranks of war-time factory workers. The homes were modest, though the acreage was choice. Close by was a true high point, with a view of the Cascades to the east and the Olympics to the west, and down in the Sound, green-forested islands.

One day, the locals watched a pillar of black smoke rise from the northern limb of the nearest island. My parents would someday move to that island, and within a few years find themselves, by choice of housing, connected by an overgrown lane to the source of that pillar of smoke, a mansion that now lay in ruins. I was but five months old. Discoveries lay in wait.

This would be their second of Island rentals, tucked into the corner of fallow farm acreage. Its sizeable shed, likely once the shelter of trucks, tractors, and fruit boxes, now stacked to the rafters with steel gratings, our landlord no farmer, but a bridge builder. In those days, there were yet roads to lay out and bridges to build.

He would later sell the house to my father, but his presence remained on the land.

His name was Alexander, and as I grew, and heard my parents speak of him, it seemed they did indeed whisper of some fabled figure. Not that I had heard of the legendary Macedonian, but rather, something in my parents’ tone of voice told me to be mindful of Alexander.

The leftover beams of his mythical works, massive truckloads of 12 x 14s, 8 x 8s, and 6 x 6s, arcane constructs of no ongoing use, and cavernous steel culverts – these last a skateboarder’s dream, had there been skateboards back then –were arrayed in the open grasses behind the shed, there to remain as engaging hangouts for us kids and our friends, and, more often, staging grounds for the lonely fantasy.

To my childish mind, my family seemed honored to curate these monuments, while no personal appearance on Alexander’s part would ever arise to deflate the image I had of him, this Mighty Doer of Great Works.

These feelings were likely enhanced the day my mother left me off at a babysitter’s house down the hill from us, towards the ferry. The sitter, Mrs. Dunn, was a round, soft woman who sat me in her lap while she read to me. I remember this moment only for what occurred at

right angle to it, as a monstrous noise arose on the highway beyond the front lawn. In full view of us, a trailer-truck, straining like The Little Engine That Could, was scaling the hill from the ferry with an enormous, red steel culvert on its back.

At the top of the hill my family lived, and I would arrive home later to discover that same culvert now at rest in the back field. Alexander had spoken, and a distant, public spectacle had been delivered into the intimacy of my home life.

I should be startled, today, by how clearly I remember each of those mute and stolid lumber piles, as if each had its own, strange name, which I still cannot guess. Youthful fantasies, misgivings, random thoughts flowed unabated through my unlicensed mind, as I posed atop the gray beams, or studied their surfaces, softened and feathered by sun and rain.

It calls to mind a correspondence of the poet Rainer Rilke, whose works I once frequented, in which he recalled his torturous years miscast in a military academy. He was bullied by all, there, without exception, to where he sometimes found peace alone in some corner, with some small, finely crafted object, a teacup or a flower, he could study and admire. “People seem,” he wrote, “but things are.”

The steel culverts, too valuable, would eventually be reclaimed and hauled away, as would the steel gratings in the shed. Scotch broom, elderberry, and alders would, in the

course of my youth, shoot up through the gaps of Alexander’s monuments. I would leave the island, returning 16 years later to find a house, and a broad, green lawn, where the monuments once had been.

Yet Alexander lived on ... somewhere, and in time I would at last get a glimpse of our hero, as he sat in a Buick Regal in my mother’s driveway. His end upon him, too old to drive or to get out of the car, his wife had brought him by on tour through the far-flung remnants of past campaigns. I couldn’t make out his features through the glass.

Coming next: Part Two, The Falcon’s Nest



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Jesus in a Stone Buddha (A Hippie in Hawaii)

By Suzanna Leigh

If you asked me now if I love Jesus, I would probably say something like “Yes! and also Yeshua, and Isa and Buddha, and Quan Yin, and every other Spiritual representation of all-encompassing love.”

Years ago, when I was a hippie in Hawaii living in a Christian commune, it was Jesus, Jesus, Jesus all the time. We sang songs to him, studied the Bible, and told people Jesus is alive! (Well, some of us did. I was never much at proselytizing.) We tried to live by Jesus’ commandments as we understood them from reading the Bible. There is power in that name, a power I sometimes see perverted today. I experienced this power deeply, as a love that transcends this material reality, at least twice.

One day, when I was living in the mansion in Hilo, I was singing one of our songs, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, there is something about that name.” Over and over I was singing it, until I was immersed in ... how do I describe it? Wonder. Compassion. An awareness of holiness. WOW!

A few months passed, and James and I were moved to Kona, on the other side of the Big Island. Here we lived in a smaller house, one of several in the community. This one had fewer people, and a young haole man as head. The men worked outside the home and we women stayed home, read the bible, took turns cooking, and went to the beach.

Lindy, my besty from Vashon, had come to join me – only her reality was very different. She and her two children, ages 3 and 5, lived in the jungle, in a hut down a long path on the side of the mountain. One of her neighbors read the words in the Bible about avoiding lustful thoughts, and “if your right eye offends thee, pluck it out” – and took it literally. Only it wasn’t his eye that offended him. He mutilated himself. Oddly, the horror of that didn’t sink in at the time.

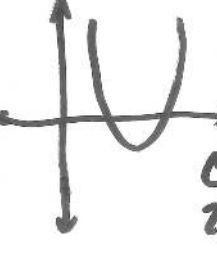
The several households often came together for worship or picnics on the beach. It was on the beach, sitting on a tree branch the thickness of my

waist, that I met Jesus again. I was singing, “Jesus is the rock of my salvation, his banner over me, his love” when I felt a strong loving presence beside me. I knew I would never be alone again.

June came, and James flew back to the mainland to spend the summer with his father. I was moved to Honolulu, where I lived in a small house with other brothers and sisters in the Waikiki Jungle, the high-crime slum part of Honolulu. My bedroom was kind of an unfinished place under the eaves, where cockroaches roamed. I prayed that they would stay off my bed and not bother me, and my prayer was answered.

One day, some sisters and I visited an old woman neighbor. We cleaned the bloody spittle from her bedside table, floor, and other surfaces while she lay in bed coughing. Her son was so grateful that he offered to take us sailing on his Hobie Cat in Honolulu Bay. I was the only one who accepted. The sun, the bright blue water, and the wind washed away any yucky feelings. Another time, I took in a couple who had escaped from an asylum and got them into the commune. They lasted a month or so before they left.

I loved going to the art museum in Honolulu. There was a stone statue of the Buddha outside the entrance, and the joy and compassion on this statue’s face matched the feelings I experienced with Jesus. I concluded that “Jesus” is much bigger than Christianity. I realized that it isn’t the name that matters, or even the dogma or theology we use to explain it, but the spirit of Divine, all-encompassing love, a love that transcends our mortal understanding.



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Singing Jesus – Illustration by Suzanna Leigh



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Time Together – Day Trip To Flaming Geyser State Park

By Ali Elsberry

Of the many benefits of homeschooling our family, one of our favorites is hopping into the car and heading out to explore someplace new. Sometimes we get lucky and stumble upon these places while out and about, but other times I do a little research ahead of time and come up with a list of parks, museums, natural areas, or other points of interest that seem worthwhile; Flaming Geyser State Park is one such place I found on a map while scouting for things to do near Black Diamond one day.

Tucked between the forested hills surrounding the Auburn Valley and curled along the Green River, Flaming Geyser State Park boasts an array of attractions, including – just as the name suggests – a flaming geyser.

The 480-acre park shows off lush flora and fauna from the forest floor to the canopy, crystal-clear creek waters, delightful wildflowers in the spring and golden hues in the fall, as well as wetlands hosting many bird species, and vast open fields – all of this setting the scene for hiking,

horseback riding, swimming, fishing kayaking and inner-tubing, bird-watching, and, of course, learning.

Upon entering the park, you will cross a cable-stayed bridge that carries you over the Green River, a section of which provides for good inner-tubing in warm weather. Just a little further in and to the northwest, you will find a large model airplane field where local RC enthusiasts are always eager to share knowledge and show off their skills. At the far end of the shared parking area is access to the river, with multiple spots for relaxing along the water’s edge, or taking a dip on a hot day.

Continuing further along, and passing through many large fields, leads you to the main area with multiple picnic tables and shelters, a playground, a trail along the river complete with interpretive trail signs about the salmon run, fishing holes, the most magnificent old-growth maple tree you have ever seen (and perfect for little climbers to explore). In this same area is a pond teeming with red-winged blackbirds (among many other avian and aquatic species), a ranger station, restrooms, and ample parking. Just beyond the eastern-most part of the parking lot is where you will find the path to the park’s namesake, the flaming geyser.

Exploratory coal miners in the early 1900s accidentally made the discovery by drilling a test hole 1,000 feet into the ground along the creek and

hitting into a cavity containing methane and salt water, which ignited and shot over 20 feet into the air, a sight to behold for sure. The source of methane has greatly depleted over the years since its discovery, and when we first started visiting the park about 5 years ago, the flame rose only a few inches high, but upon our most recent trip it was not visible at all. A local who happened to be there at the same time as us said she never goes there without a lighter now, and she relit the flame for us, which was just a flicker, but still fun to witness.

Another trail from here leads you through a forested path that will eventually bring you to the second geyser, which bubbles up to the surface of the creek, and where you can still detect the smell of sulfur. Large fir trees with their massive exposed roots growing along the hillside seem to dwarf anyone standing near, and the peaceful surroundings encourage reflection.

The trails that weave throughout the park range from easy to moderate, and although only accounting for less than 4.5 miles in combined length, there is so much to see each step of the way that you’ll feel like you’ve explored much more.

At about a 50-minute drive from the Point Defiance ferry, this is a very enjoyable day trip that has something to offer everyone. I recommend making the trek mid-to-late morning to avoid traffic and ferry lines. A Discover Pass is required to enjoy the park, or you can purchase a day-pass at the kiosk right after entering if needed. Flaming Geyser State Park can be found at 23700 SE Flaming Geyser Rd, Auburn, WA 98092.

Endless Chores

By Seán C. Malone & John Sweetman

Seán and I talked about our story and came up with the idea of our early money-making jobs. It turns out that Seán had been involved for some time in a “pen pal” arrangement with some young literate persons and had pursued this; his story follows mine.

In our youth, we all received some kind of an ‘allowance,’ which was usually based upon the performance of regular household chores. In addition, we also did seasonal work for real wages. We all picked berries and participated in haying season.

Gene Amundson and I picked strawberries. We kids were met by a bus and basically were indentured servants until the bus returned us very late in the day. We were paid by the crate and it was hot, hard work.

One time, Gene and I were “fired” three times in one day for “allegedly” starting a strawberry fight. “Firing” at that time was more like “detention,” so we were allowed to return several times. Oddly, I recall we made more money that time than usual because, when we actually worked, we were good.

One summer, my dad logged a 40-acre stand that had significant cascara tree debris. Cascara bark was used as a base for a laxative. I did not know what that was. It turns out cascara berries are also effective to that “end,” so to speak. My sister has finally forgiven me for testing that scientific concept on her.

I made enough money by peeling, drying, and selling the bark to pay for a train trip to Montana to visit my cousins. I think I was on the Great Northern train through Thompson Falls, with the last of the great steam engines pulling us up the grade.

In Helena, we actually made money lawn-mowing, and providing hay help and various other deeds so that I could bring back a whole bag of silver dollars that I kept for years. My cousin and I panned gold and kept a significant amount of that for years. Lost in the past, but maybe used at the dentist.

Now to Seán’s story with his pen



pals. He actually had a “real” job for a time.

Dear Pen Pal,

I’m sorry I’m late in answering your letter. I have never resented my work at the Skippercraft Marina in Cove, a half mile north of where we lived on five acres.

I was 13 years old, and 75 cents an hour was big money in 1953. I was especially proud when Harry Larson, the owner, told me how I should stain and fill the Mahogany foredeck of the 14-foot kicker boats.

I used a folded burlap bag to apply the stain, waited and wiped the foredeck to get rid of the excess stain and bring out the patterns in the Mahogany. If I wasn’t careful, the finish would be muddy in places.

Chores at home were repetitive and boring, like cutting the grass and cleaning up after our three dogs so we wouldn’t step in the dog manure and track it into the house.

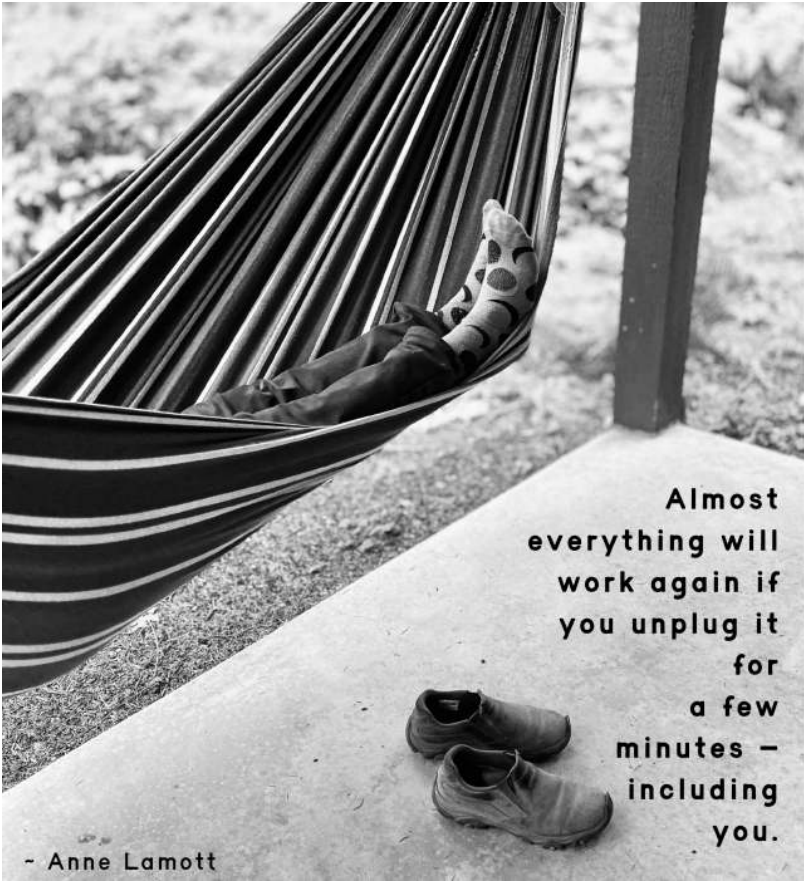
Dad would often read to us before bedtime. One day, he brought home a book called “Cheaper by the Dozen,” which described how 12 children would get together on Sunday after church, to bid on their favorite chores for the next week.

The winning bid for the chore did not always go to the lowest bidder, as Mom would only accept those bids that were level with the quality she expected in the completed chore.

Molly, Mike, and I all wanted to lick the beater after Mom used it to produce frosting for one of her delicious birthday cakes. A war for the frosting beater started. The bidding for chores was dropped shortly after that.



Photography by Claudia Hollander-Lucas



Llaughing Llamas Chronicles

By Daniel Hooker

From Eliza

Q: What kind of shoes does a literary writer wear?

A: Converse.

~

Some people are confused about what a will is. To me, it’s pretty obvious.

It’s a dead giveaway.

~

Archeologists are having a huge party tonight. They found the largest dinosaur tibia bone ever!

It should be a hell of a shin dig.

~

I went to a tobacco store I had frequented for years. It had closed and was an apparel store.

It was clothes, but no cigar.

~

Today I found out in my research that having tropical fish in your house can help calm the brain.

It must be all those indoor fins.

~

My friend Jack says he can talk to vegetables.

Yep, that’s right. Jack and the beans talk.

~

Q: What do you call a French woman who gets scratched by a cat?

A: Claudette.

~

Q: What do you call a moose that works for the CIA?

A: Anonymous.

~

When your girlfriend comes home dressed all in white, smelling like honey, and covered in bee stings, you know she’s a Keeper.

Free Minds, Brave Discourse, and True Diversity – Three Things I Want for Our Island

By March Twisdale

Today, on Vashon Island, most people police themselves and their speech. Reticence to express full and honest opinions has become the norm. I know this because people tell me it is so.

A woman slows to a stop in the middle of the road, calling out to me, “You’re March Twisdale, right? I can’t wait to read your articles! I’ve been here forty years and I keep thinking, why can’t we talk about things anymore?”

An Island musician, upon realizing who I am, looks around to see if we are alone, then says, “I am so distressed! As a musician and a conservative, I have to stay silent or risk losing gigs and friends. Can we talk sometime?”

Another Islander confides, “I’m an old-school Democrat, but nowadays, my wife has become so radicalized, we’ve had to take politics completely off the table.”

However, despite this growing trend, some have recently declared, “Vashon Island is exceptionally tolerant.” Is it? Really?

For far too many of us, Vashon has become an Island rife with suppression. Ideologues have increasingly forced their opinions on others, through aggressive campaigns of public and private pressure, resulting in an atmosphere of intolerance and quick retribution.

Freedom of thought, which used to be normative on Vashon Island, has become risky. And I do mean “thought.” Admit it. If the “wrong” thought flutters through your head, do you tense up? Wonder how you could have such a thought? Seek to squelch it, shove it aside, or change it to align it with what others consider acceptable?

Does this reaction to a tense social environment make sense? Yes! Because, thinking outside the bubble can lead you to accidentally verbalize your unacceptable thoughts where others can hear them. (Gasp!)

Island Resilience

When we stifle our tongues, our minds inevitably follow. It’s how we avoid harsh consequences from slips of the tongue. But, perhaps worse, it’s how we humans avoid cognitive dissonance.

This is not the Vashon Island I moved to in 2004. Is it the Island you moved to in the 1960s? The 1980s? Or even just a decade ago?

Would I choose to raise my children in a community where those who step out of line can expect things to get unpleasant fast? No. Would I move to a community where people endlessly claim to love diversity while crushing it as swiftly and ruthlessly as possible? Definitely not.

Yet, here we are.

About a month ago, an Islander posted a brief compliment about my article series on a Vashon Facebook group. She wrote only this, and I quote:

“I would like to thank March Twisdale for the series of articles she writes in The Vashon Loop. No matter what “side” Islanders take, she is willing to speak about it. Keep up the strong work, March!”

The result? A flood of comments by “March Haters” dredging up their dislike of my views and opinions, extending back for years. They also attacked, condemned, and scolded the woman. “How dare you say anything good about that woman [me].” And yes, the attacks on me were very personal. Gross, rude, and intentionally insulting. These people even went looking for other posts I’d written (including about my dog, who’s going blind), just so they could write mean and nasty comments there, too.

Facebook gang-up moments like these have a distinct, chilling effect. For example, none of the Islanders who “liked” the woman’s complimentary post entered the comment section “snake pit.” Before you accuse me of imagining this, consider my conversation with a local barista a few days later.

“I saw someone complimented your article series on Facebook.” She said. “That’s nice!”

I nodded and asked, “Did you read the comments?”

She shook her head, “Oh no! I saw one laughing emoji and decided not to look.”

Yes. That’s all she needed to see. One “laughing” emoji, and she knew what most of us know. Someone was being cruel, hateful, and sarcastic in the comment section. Her reaction? Avoid the snake pit. Keep on scrolling. Don’t engage.

Contrary to what the “Hate Has No Place On Our Island” signs suggest, my experience is that many Islanders who want to be “against hate” are falling prey to others for whom myriad forms of coercion / social pressure are considered acceptable means to an end.

There is a fine line between working collaboratively toward a better future and trying to force it. Bullying tactics are powerful and have an impact, which is why they are so seductive. Stomping on another person, especially in social media venues, evokes feelings of power, props up ego, feeds a sense of superiority, nurtures self-righteousness, and offers a false sense of unity. Why false? Because a bully cannot be trusted. Step out of line, and they will turn on you, too.

This needs to be said, so we can start dealing with the elephant in the room and the naked emperors walking down main street in their invisible garments. The intolerance of those demanding tolerance (or else!) is deeply disturbing to me and many. So, let’s talk about it. Openly.

And now, let me clarify the title of this article. I said I want “Brave” discourse. But that’s not the real goal. I want an Island where “Honest” discourse doesn’t require bravery. One where you are not risking cancellation by your community, friends, or family simply for speaking your true thoughts out loud.

I value diversity, because I know the power and value of the minority voice. Because I am endlessly curious. Because it is the person with the contrary view (for now) who I can learn the most from! Because iron sharpens iron.

But, no. I do not value rudeness, hostility, character assassination, and bullying.

Continued on Page 8

Spagyrics: Renaissance Medicine for Modern Imbalances

By Anthony Latora

Spagyrics aspire to redefine what herbal medicine can be. Rooted in the Renaissance era, yet increasingly affirmed by modern analysis, they offer a way of preparing plants that seeks not merely to extract their chemistry, but to preserve their wholeness. Rather than viewing a plant as a collection of isolated compounds, the spagyric process works to reunite its body, soul, and spirit into a single, living medicine.

Popularized during the Renaissance by Paracelsus – the physician often regarded as the father of modern toxicology. This field of study focuses on poisons and their safe exposure limits; Paracelsus coined the phrase, “The dose makes the poison.”, as he found that a poison was not purely the substance itself but the dose administered. Through further investigations he found medicinal virtues in substances known to be generally known as toxic or poisonous in small doses. While modern science has validated many of his observations, Paracelsus’ greater contribution was a philosophy of medicine that sought to understand the whole of nature rather than its isolated parts. To this day, these spagyric preparations continue to inspire herbalists and alchemists

throughout the world.

The word spagyric is derived from two Greek roots: spao, meaning “to separate,” and ageiro, meaning “to reunite.” These two actions embody the alchemical principle: solve et coagula – dissolve and recombine. Separation and reunion are the foundation of every spagyric preparation, transforming an ordinary herbal extract into something that reflects the plant’s complete nature.

What makes a spagyric different?

The first distinction is the inclusion of the plant’s purified mineral salts. After the initial tincture is made through soaking the herbs in alcohol for an extended period of time and filtered off, the remaining plant material is carefully calcined by heating it in a crucible until it is reduced into a white ash. From there the mineral salts are recovered, purified by being placed in distilled water then filtered to removed any impurities. The remaining liquid is then heated and the water is allowed to evaporate until the purified mineral salts remain then collected and returned to the tincture.

During this reunion, the alkaline salts combine with the essential oils and acids in the plant to form new compounds known as plant esters



White sage beginning to calcine.
Photo by Anthony Latora

through a process called esterification.

This transformation produces a preparation unlike a conventional tincture. Plant esters help bridge both water-soluble and fat-soluble compounds, allowing for broader absorption throughout the body. The finished medicine also becomes closer to pH neutral, making it less oxidizing and often gentler on digestion.

A second distinction is the intentional timing of harvest and preparation. Traditional practitioners observed that plants, like all living things, move through natural cycles influenced by the seasons, the moon, and the heavens. There is an ideal time to plant, prune, harvest, and prepare each medicine.

Even modern herbalists recognize many of these rhythms. Roots are typically harvested in autumn or early spring when the plant’s vitality is concentrated below ground. Leaves and flowers are gathered during peak growth, while fruits are collected once

fully ripe. A nearly full moon is traditionally favored when harvesting above-ground parts, while the new moon is preferred for roots and seed planting, reflecting the movement of the plant’s vital forces. These practices alone can significantly improve the quality of an herbal preparation.

Spagyric practitioners takes this observation a step further by considering planetary correspondences alongside seasonal timing. Individual plants may also be harvested on the day or planetary hour associated with their ruling planet – mugwort on Monday, roses on Friday, and so forth. Interestingly, these relationships persist in many languages. In Spanish, for example, Monday is lunes, reflecting the Moon, while Friday is viernes, honoring Venus.

Nettle offers an excellent example of this practice. Traditionally associated with Mars, nettle leaf is ideally harvested in the spring, near the astrological season of Aries, when the moon is nearly full and – when practical – on its planetary day or hour. The fresh plant is extracted in alcohol, drawing out what alchemists describe as the soul (essential oils) and the spirit (alcohol). The remaining plant matter is then burned to ash, allowing the purified mineral salts – the body of the plant – to be recovered. These salts are reunited with the tincture, restoring the plant’s

Continued on Page 8

Free Minds, Brave Discourse, and True Diversity

Continued from Page 7

Why do I keep talking? Writing? Listening? And sharing what I hear from others too shy or vulnerable to speak up? It’s because I want us all to regain some Island equilibrium. We need balanced, centrist voices speaking up. Maybe you’re one of them?

We are Americans. We are a land of different people, melting together in a pot filled with vibrant colors. Our country is multi-hued, containing a beautiful mishmash of ideas, faiths, viewpoints, and opinions. We are not a muted, dull color of grayish purple. Nor should we want to be!

I will also say this. “If your ideas could stand on merit, then you’d be politely explaining them to us.” Not using compulsion, coercion, and implied threats to push them down our throats.

Human ideas gestate best and are birthed most healthfully from the womb of freedom. Our best future will come from a culture of celebrating the value people uniquely

offer. It’s not just what you say, it’s also how you say it. Diverse voices, *honorably* expressed with strength, decency, and respect, bring the salt, the spice, and the glue a diverse society needs.

I believe the best culture trusts and values free thinking, free speech, and honest discourse. Do you? I want more stories, more information, more ideas, and more data points. Do you? And, I deeply appreciate understanding my own thoughts better, after having heard myself explain them to others. Do you? How can our “opinions” grow, shift and change, if we stifle mature discourse?

I want Vashon Island, and our country, to be a high-trust environment. A society where free minds, brave/honest discourse, and true diversity become the norm, once again. I want this for me and you today. But, more importantly, I want to protect, preserve, and foster this for all Americans yet to be.



Spagyrics

Continued from Page 7

body, soul, and spirit into one medicine.

The result is often a preparation with a remarkable depth and potency that differs noticeably from a conventional extract. Within the alchemical tradition, nettle is also understood to help harmonize the positive qualities associated with Mars – assertiveness, courage, determination, passion, and helps to quell the negative expressions of excess, aggression, impatience, and anger.

Like the art of alchemy itself, much of spagyric medicine has long been shrouded in mystery, preserved through symbolism, allegory, and cryptic language. Fortunately, this tradition is experiencing a quiet revival, with dedicated practitioners once again bringing these remarkable preparations into the hands of those

seeking a deeper relationship with plant medicine. Because of the care and craftsmanship involved, spagyrics are typically produced in small artisan batches rather than on an industrial scale.

If this article has sparked your curiosity, I encourage you to explore the work of my teachers, Sajah Popham through Natura Sophia Spagyrics and Robert Bartlett through Spagyricus. For those who wish to learn the craft themselves, Robert Bartlett’s in-person intensives and Sajah Popham’s online courses provide two of the most accessible paths into the tradition. If you prefer to begin with a book, *Real Alchemy* by Robert Bartlett or *Spagyrics* by Manfred M. Junius are excellent primers on both alchemical philosophy and the practical art of spagyric preparations.



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Summer Tomato Salsa Fresca

By Caitlin Rothermel

It’s tomato season, and maybe your garden is overflowing. It seemed like a good time to share this delicious salsa adapted from “The Moosewood Cookbook.”

I discovered Moosewood in college in the 1980s, just as I was learning to cook. At the time, it seemed like everyone owned a copy, and for good reason. Moosewood was the first cookbook to focus on vegetarian food that actually tasted good, and this was a period in time when many people wanted to eat less meat, but most vegetarian dishes were ... not impressive.

Moosewood was also one of those rare publishing and cultural success stories that probably couldn’t happen today. For beginner me, it was the perfect introduction to cooking. I liked meat, but found it a little intimidating; somehow, vegetables seemed more approachable.

This salsa made me popular at parties. Everyone loved it, and if I needed to prepare it on-site, one or two people always wandered over to help chop vegetables, turning the task into an unexpectedly effortless social interaction.

Recently, I rediscovered the recipe and have been making it regularly again. I still think it’s one of the best salsas I’ve ever had. I think the recipe’s magic comes from the addition of cumin and a touch of both vinegar and olive oil. But of course, I couldn’t resist making a few changes to suit my own taste.

For the curious, here’s how my version differs from the original:

- The original recipe briefly simmers the tomatoes, removes the skins and seeds, then minces them. I skip that step because I prefer the bright flavor of fresh, raw tomatoes.
- The original uses just 1–2 tablespoons of lime juice and no zest. I think lime zest is one of the secret ingredients that really makes the salsa shine.
- I added corn because I love the sweetness and crunch it brings.
- Finally, the original recipe calls for toasting cumin seeds, then grinding them with a spice grinder or mortar and pestle. I did this for years. One day, though, I was in a hurry and used ground cumin instead. It was great, too, so now I take this shortcut.

Summer Tomato Salsa Fresca

Adapted from “The Moosewood Cookbook”

Ingredients

- 3 to 6 medium tomatoes, diced
- 1 large red onion, diced
- 2 to 4 scallions, minced
- 1 cup corn, fresh or frozen
- 1 to 2 jalapeño peppers, minced
- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced
- 1 lime, juice and zest
- 1 bundle cilantro and/or parsley, minced
- 1 to 1.5 tsp cumin
- ~1.0 to 1.5 tsp kosher salt
- 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp olive oil

Directions

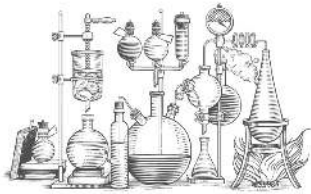
Mix all ingredients together. Ideally, refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving.

Sometimes, I cut the tomatoes ahead of time and let them rest in a sieve under cloth before adding the other ingredients to drain out excess liquid – for at least several hours. That way, the final product is not too moist, and the lime juice, vinegar, and oil are well-distributed.

This recipe makes enough for a party or several meals, and it’s great to share as a gift. Serve with chips, eggs, tacos, meat, rice and beans, etc. Refrigerated, the salsa lasts at least a week, often even longer.

A Note on Alchemy

By Anthony Latora



At its heart, alchemy is the art of consciously assisted evolution. It is the process of transforming life's difficulties into wisdom, resilience, and greater wholeness.

The classical alchemists described this journey through seven operations: Calcination, Dissolution, Separation, Conjunction, Fermentation, Distillation, and Coagulation.

These operations are not limited to the laboratory. They also serve as a map for personal transformation. As the alchemist refines the medicine, the medicine refines the alchemist.

Through working with the natural world, we learn to separate what is essential from what no longer serves us, reunite what has become fragmented, and cultivate a deeper relationship with ourselves, the plants, and the living world around us.



Humming Helps

A Health Matter

By Caitlin Rothermel

If humming came in a pill, you would probably consider taking it.

One of humming’s most measured effects is on the nervous system. Even a single session of humming promotes parasympathetic activity, also known as the “rest and digest” state. This is the body’s natural recovery mode, where the heart slows, stress decreases, and internal resources are redirected towards healing, processing, and repair.

Vibrations from humming also directly affect the sinus cavities around the nose, creating pressure waves that literally “ventilate” this normally poorly ventilated area. Think of it as gently pumping fresh air through tiny chambers where air movement is usually limited. This dramatically increases the release of nitric oxide (NO), a molecule produced in especially high concentrations in the sinuses. NO plays a major role in keeping blood vessels healthy and in the body’s natural defenses against bacteria, viruses, and fungi.

This NO finding led to an intriguing question – could repeatedly ventilating the sinuses while bathing them in NO, achieved by humming, help relieve chronic sinusitis? One researcher tested this

approach on himself, practicing deep humming for one hour at bedtime followed by 60 to 120 hums four times a day. He reported that his month-long chronic sinus symptoms improved dramatically within four days.

The quality of humming that is most helpful is the kind of deep hum that vibrates your nasal passages and is built on short, repeated phrases. A number of traditional vocal practices have these characteristics, including Buddhist, Hindu, Gregorian, and many Native American chants, as well as the deep “Ommmm ...” that many of us have voiced at least once.

All these forms of humming trigger the same basic physiologic pattern: prolonged exhalation, slow rhythmic breathing, and sustained vocal vibration. Together, these features help stimulate the vagus nerve, one of the body’s primary communication pathways between the brain and major organs.

Named after a Latin word that means “wandering,” the vagus nerve starts in the brainstem, just behind the back of the throat. As it descends through the neck into the chest and abdomen, it divides again and again, sending branches to the heart, lungs, stomach, intestines, and other organs. Spread out across the lower body, those branches almost resemble the kind of apron you would tie around your waist.

Reading this description, you might expect that the vagus works in

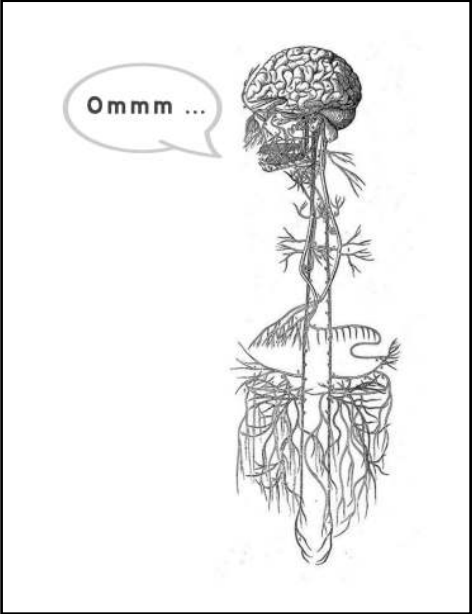
Health Matters

a top-down, “brain-to-bottom” manner, but that would be incorrect. Most of its signaling (about 80%) is conducted from the bottom-up (from the “apron” area back to the brain). The vagus primarily acts as a sensory information highway to inform the brain about the body’s internal state.

Only about 20% of the vagus nerve’s activity involves carrying commands from the brain to the body. That’s where humming comes in. Branches of the vagus directly control the vocal cords (or folds, as they are now more often called), parts of the throat and larynx, and the muscles involved in swallowing. When you hum, the brain sends signals downward through these branches to produce the sound. At the same time, the humming alters breathing, vibration, and the body’s internal state, generating new sensory signals that travel back to the brain along the vagus.

In this sense, humming creates a self-sustaining conversation between the brain and body.

One of the clearest ways scientists observe this conversation is through its effect on the heart. The vagus nerve slows heart rate and helps regulate the timing between heartbeats. As humming encourages slow, rhythmic breathing and strengthens vagal activity, it also tends to increase heart rate variability (HRV), the subtle variation in time between heartbeats that reflects the



nervous system’s ability to adapt to changing demands.

Higher HRV is generally associated with greater resilience and a healthier balance between the body’s stress and recovery systems. In one study, humming improved several measures of HRV and reduced the physiological stress index more than sleep.

I know what some of you are thinking: “Humming is fine, but I’m more of a singer.” Good news – singing appears to engage many of the same bodily pathways, although it has not been studied in as much depth. Like humming, singing naturally encourages slower, deeper breathing, and prolonged exhalation.

One fascinating study found that, when choir members sang together, their breathing and heart rhythms gradually synchronized.

Science doesn’t often make headlines for explaining ordinary things. But sometimes it reminds us that the habits we’ve had for centuries were quietly doing something useful all along.

Here’s a link to a short video, “5-Minute Humming Practice for Anxiety Relief” that can get you started; there are lots of other useful videos that are easy to find: www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7qSclakd3A

See article on vashonloop.com for links to the studies mentioned

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Math Puzzle

By Anne Cotter Moses

A String of Digits

Using the below string of digits, place Plus and minus signs between some Of the digits such that the result is 100. For example, we could use 9+87-65-4 +321, But that gives us 348 instead of the Outcome of 100.

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

See bottom of page 11 for the Solution

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Aries (March 20-April 19)

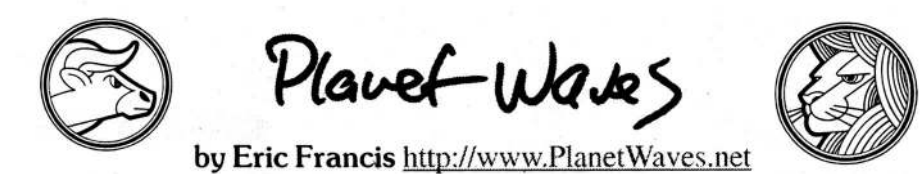
One factor of existence in our moment is the emotional bog. I get that many people seem cut off, aloof and numbed out – that’s the stuck energy. For the past year, Jupiter has been in Cancer, your 4th place of emotions and matters of personal safety. For you this may have felt like drinking two quarts of water on a hot day. Next week, Jupiter makes its way into your fellow fire sign Leo, and this will feel like just the right amount of water, with your mind and body running at the right temperature. Another factor of your solar chart is that there’s still a pileup happening in your sign, which includes Saturn and also a supercharged Neptune. The point of disorder is that Saturn is driving false certainty while Neptune is driving false confusion. There’s only one way to resolve this, which is through experience. Leo, where Jupiter is about to arrive, is your solar 5th house. The 5th is about experience. Yes, officially the list of themes is games, gambling, pleasure, play and making art. Figuring out the nature of a house is asking about what its various properties have in common, and the answer for the 5th house is direct experience. Jupiter means a lot of something. Aries fire to Leo fire is movement, energy and venting pressure. Don’t be like one of those children who has an iPad in their crib or is followed around by a drone. Do something you think is a little dangerous, then do something else the next day.

Taurus (April 19-May 20)

You are always worried about something, and the combination of Chiron in your birth sign and Jupiter entering Leo are saying give it a rest. The adventure of growth is upon you. The aspect pattern, originating in Taurus, is Jupiter square Chiron. You might sum this as “shift happens.” I would describe shift, first, as course correction. Seven years of Uranus in your sign (which ended in April) may have blown you far off course and skewed your priorities. The remedy is not to travel back to the point where you got lost, but rather to figure out where it was and then start again from where you are (which is, at least, an interesting place). Since you don’t usually embrace change voluntarily, you tend to live from shock to shock and that’s how you make progress. Chiron has a different approach, which is to tune into your awareness. I mean particularly that spot that you know about but often avoid, which is the buttonhole where your mind meets your body. Rather than getting stunned, sailing into a hurricane or flying into a thunderstorm, Chiron is saying take your inner direction every day and follow what your inner voice is saying to you. There is plenty you have already figured out and don’t need to think about again. And remember, when you feel fear in any form, that is likely to be the shadow side of making contact with your actual power of both thought and action.

Gemini (May 20-June 21)

Mars entered Gemini on Sunday, June 28, and whatever it represents will define the following six weeks. Right away, Mars bends the lunar nodes, so there is some kind of fast pivot indicated. On July 4, Mars is conjunct Uranus. Then Mars is trine Pluto. These are aspects that you want to use consciously rather than merely have happen to you. The same is true for the rest of Mars through your sign, which ends Aug. 11. From day-to-day there



will be unusual contact points with other planets, meaning information, people and circumstances. Mars wants to go fast and far, especially in Gemini. I suggest you go slowly enough at all times to notice everything that seems noteworthy from multiple viewpoints. Insert yourself into the frame; engage with people in physical space and in realtime long enough to find out what is going on for them. That means a real human exchange, something the world pretends to care little about and might not miss when it’s gone. You care, and you are noticing what is going missing. And while you’re not here to save the world, you are here to save your own world, and to act in protection and service of your personal domain of existence. Your primary spiritual calling remains social. Your practical or vocational calling, at the same time, has a spiritual or mystical quality. That means embracing and gazing into the mystery rather than swiping left or right.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Jupiter’s ingress into Leo will bring good news for your financial situation. You have not been lacking for energy, only for results. It’s essential now that you focus on money with a conscious plan and dedication, and moreover, that you be open to success. Throughout this month, a diversity of factors come into alignment that represent a major course correction. Your role is to identify potential sources of revenue and investment while holding back on tapping them until Mercury stations direct in your birth sign on July 23. By that time, you’re likely to be in a radically new environment with broader perception and much better ideas that supplant your existing lexicon of concepts and expectations. Most of these were waiting on you for discovery; that discovery will be based on corrections to your angle of view and suspending certain negative expectations. There is one concept that is essential to your success, which is that you see your fears as representing power sources. Anxiety is often connected to the potential of getting a result and thereby changing the world, if just a little. This will involve some confrontation, both inner and outer. You will need to test whether a particular anxiety is valid or not in order to see what it conceals. Success is not a matter of luck, despite outer appearances. It’s always a matter of courage, persistence and taking adequate time to make the correct decision. Do your diligence, set goals and set deadlines.

Leo (July 22-Aug. 23)

Jupiter arrived in your sign on June 30, and this is the start of a rollicking month and an equally wild year. If astrology means anything, your confidence will be at an all-time high – though this calls for caution. Chiron’s presence in the picture indicates that you must pace yourself, act within your powers, and place your deepest personal values above success in any form. Such a statement verges on meaninglessness in 2026, when the goal of nearly every new venture is to make as much money as possible as fast as possible and not worry about what happens to anyone else. Chiron in Taurus, your 10th house, will pin you to

your personal truth. While the opinions of others don’t matter much, it’s essential that you live in a way that is subject to scrutiny. You must be true to yourself at any cost. Make decisions with the thought of how they will play out, and how they will look, in the future. Also note that the presence of a special point called Vulcanus is in the equation, along with Pluto. This is your reminder that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and that it’s likely to occur on an instant karma basis. What may seem like simple circumstances are far more intricate, complex and interwoven than you can see right now. Bold action that you take around July 20 will be based on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and at the same time remind you of how everything and everyone is interconnected.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sep. 22)

Events in late June popped you free in places you didn’t know you were stuck. There is an old adage for those who drive standard shift: “Tis better to leave wheel than to burn clutch.” That means it’s better to pop the clutch fast and burn some rubber than it is to hesitate getting started, wear down the clutch plates and fill the car up with asbestos smoke. And you may have that feeling; the combination of the South Node and special point Transpluto in your sign has an agonizingly narrow quality. Mars is about to come in from the Gemini side of the nodes, make a conjunction to Uranus (a LOT of energy), and burst you free from whatever bog you are in – most likely a mental pattern of some kind. At the same time, Chiron’s ingress into Taurus reminds you not to be so pious about your beliefs. Just because you’re a Marxist doesn’t mean that everyone else is wrong. Okay, I know you’re not a Marxist but you know what I mean: any beliefs that might qualify for a system. Chiron in Taurus is delivering a spiritual message that says go direct to source. Skip the intermediaries, the interpreters, the spirit guides and the YouTube experts. Truth is not just something you know in your mind (which is rare enough) but also something you feel in your body. Both must be present before you can safely count an idea as valid. Pump the brakes every time you hear yourself say the word “believe.” Under the influence of Chiron, I suggest you believe absolutely nothing.

Libra (Sep. 22-Oct. 23)

You’re about to embark on one of the most social times of your life, which will open up many possibilities for you. This is about Jupiter entering your 11th place of hopes and dreams. Jupiter is about expansion, and I would remind those who are not up on their astronomy that the largest planet is also denser than Saturn, and it has 115 confirmed natural satellites along with a ring system. Jupiter rules all of the orbits in the solar system and makes the Sun wobble as it cycles around the galaxy. This all describes considerable sway and influence, and these things must be handled cautiously. That means consciously. Jupiter in Leo will get its first proving moment the first week or so of July, when it forms a square to the planet of awareness and healing, Chiron. The nature of this

aspect is to help you figure out what resources are available to you, what you owe and what is owed to you. It will be necessary for you to refine both your business plan and your public relations plan, all with a mind toward efficiently providing the service that you offer. You can and will benefit if you proceed with intention, dedication and a whole-system approach. You stand to do very well, yet your emphasis must be on the service angle rather than the profit and gain angle. This is a matter of ethos; it is a spiritual matter and a value that must influence or directly underlie every decision you make.

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 22)

Scorpio is a dark and mysterious sign, but there is part of you that loves to shine. And shine you may, with Jupiter about to move across the 10th house of your solar chart. This transit will draw you out into the world, where you may be visible and receive some accolades for what you’ve accomplished. Then there is the opposite angle of your chart, Aquarius in the 4th place, which addresses matters of one’s home and security base. Of all the polarities that must be balanced, the 4th/10th is among the most important and the most vulnerable to going out of balance. The business of the 10th house takes people away from their family; significant success can make them feel like someone they are not, and lead to forgetting one’s roots. Pluto is moving through your 4th, low and slow, insisting that you maintain a high priority on in-home family matters. There are times when balance is possible, and that must be a community decision if there is a community involved. Later in July, Jupiter lines up with Pluto and you will experience a surge of power. In this role, Pluto may serve as a deep well of emotional confidence that you’ve hardly ever experienced before. You will have opportunities that you’ve never had. And you not only want the support of the people closest to you; it is a condition of success. In any event, you are about to discover what a small world our seemingly great big world really is, and how everything connects to everything else.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 22)

Not everything is a matter of image. At a certain point there must be consideration of substance, and of actual value – not just perceived value. Not just the value of perception. We live in a world where it’s an ever-present temptation to create a big splash, particularly now. Based on a diversity of factors, I suggest you back away from this. Chiron is one of the planets associated with your sign; you are depicted by a centaur and Chiron was the first of these rare archetypal creatures. It is now newly in Taurus, which represents you embarking on a dramatically different and new phase of life. Another planet associated with your sign, Jupiter, is also about to change signs, into Leo, and the first thing that happens is that they make contact in a 90-degree angle, a square. This pattern emphasizes practical work driven by a vision. Jupiter square Chiron has extraordinary power to ground deep wisdom into practical knowledge; it is about the application of ideas to something highly unusual that occurs in physical reality. Its mark is in the natal charts of great authors and great composers. Plenty else is happening that could distract you.

Mahadasha Cycles in Vedic Astrology

Continued from Front Page

The United States in Rahu Mahadasha

People aren’t the only ones with Mahadasha cycles. Nations have them, too. In the natal chart used for this interpretation, the US entered its Rahu Mahadasha on August 12, 2016, coinciding with the presidential election cycle, and the cycle continues

The Meaning and Length of Each Mahadasha Cycle

Ketu (7 years): Associated with detachment, introspection, spiritual inquiry, sudden changes, and release from old patterns.

Venus (20 years): Linked with relationships, marriage, art, beauty, luxury, social life, and material comforts.

Sun (6 years): Highlights identity, authority, confidence, leadership, government, career visibility, and father-related themes.

Moon (10 years): Emphasizes emotions, home life, mother, mental peace, public connection, nurturing, and changeability.

Mars (7 years): Brings focus to action, courage, competition, property, siblings, technical skill, and conflict management.

Rahu (18 years): Intensifies ambition, worldly desire, foreign connections, technology, unconventional choices, and sudden rises or instability.

Jupiter (16 years): Supports learning, wisdom, teaching, children, ethics, expansion, prosperity, and spiritual growth.

Saturn (19 years): Emphasizes discipline, responsibility, maturity, endurance, career structure, delays, and long-term results.

Mercury (17 years): Focuses on communication, business, writing, education, analysis, adaptability, and networking.

until August 12, 2034.

Rahu is associated with disruption, ambition, technology, foreign influence, mass desire, illusion, and unconventional change.

Spiritually, Rahu asks a nation to confront the shadow of its collective cravings, fears, projections, and unfinished karma.

For a nation, Rahu Mahadasha is often read as a period of rapid change, heightened contradictions, and intensified collective desire. It can bring innovation and global visibility, but may also expose instability when ambition, illusion, or polarization become excessive.

At its highest expression, Rahu can awaken a deeper need for truth, discernment, humility, and spiritual maturity.

Rahu in Cancer and the Ninth House

Rahu currently occupies the ninth house in Cancer, where it is conjunct retrograde Mercury. Cancer highlights homeland, protection, security, emotional identity, and collective belonging, while the ninth house points to national beliefs, law, higher principles, ideology, publishing, education, and foreign relations.

Spiritually, this placement suggests a collective lesson around faith, truth, emotional security, and the beliefs that shape national destiny.

The US is also in a Mercury Bhukti, or sub-cycle, which adds emphasis to communication, trade, finance, markets, negotiation, media, and possible economic disruption.

Current Cancer Transits

Jupiter has recently entered Cancer, its sign of exaltation, where it is considered especially strong. Mercury and Venus are also transiting Cancer, further emphasizing this part of the chart. Together, these influences suggest that money, security, and financial stability may remain central themes over the next year.

Because Jupiter’s transit lasts about 14 months, this period may bring heightened focus to national wealth, economic confidence, financial systems, and the public’s sense of security. On a spiritual level, it asks whether material security is guided by wisdom, compassion, and right relationship with one another.

A balanced interpretation is that Rahu Mahadasha does not simply mean “bad times.” It can bring major innovation, visibility, and transformation, but may also create instability if desire, illusion, or unchecked ambition become dominant.

Spiritually, Rahu becomes a mirror, revealing where longing has turned into attachment and where collective power must be guided by conscience.

Applied to the US, the central themes can be described as technological rise, cultural upheaval, political disruption, and confrontation with

National Themes of Rahu Mahadasha

Ambition and expansion: A stronger drive for power, influence, innovation, and dominance.

Technological acceleration: Breakthroughs in AI, digital systems, surveillance, media, space, and unconventional industries.

Political polarization: Greater confusion, extremes, populism, scandals, and sudden reversals.

Foreign entanglements: Increased focus on borders, alliances, international conflict, immigration, and multicultural identity.

Media distortion and illusion: A rise in misinformation, propaganda, viral narratives, conspiracy thinking, and confusion about truth.

Economic extremes: Speculation, bubbles, wealth inequality, sudden gains and shocks.

Social transformation: Rapid shifts in identity, values, culture, and public behavior.

national desires and contradictions. Beneath these outer events is a deeper invitation to awaken discernment, heal division, and remember the spiritual responsibility that comes with power.

Collective Spiritual Reflection

As Americans, we are collectively moving through the spiritual lessons of the United States’ Rahu Mahadasha. This period invites us to examine our desires, illusions, fears, and deeper national karma, while asking how we can transform confusion into wisdom, division into compassion, and power into service.

Seen this way, Rahu is not only a force of disruption; it is also a spiritual catalyst. It reveals what has been hidden, magnifies what has been avoided, and urges both individuals and nations to choose awareness over illusion.

To learn where you are in your Mahadasha cycle, and what it means, feel free to contact me at ayurvedicastrologer@gmail.com. If you would like to know more about what a Rahu cycle looks like for a person, read the extended version of this article online at vashonloop.com.

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Planet Waves

Continued from Page 10

Glamour, conflict, and the desire for notoriety, are all among them. Anything externalized could have the same effect: seeing something as outside of yourself. Keep your focus inward. Skip the social game. Forget about being known for anything and focus on learning and quietly knowing.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 20)

For you, the combination of Chiron’s entry into Taurus and Jupiter’s nearly simultaneous entry into Leo is about tapping deep and unusual potential. Taurus through your highly creative 5th house is driving you to experiment and to be open to unusual new experiences. Jupiter through Leo, your 8th house, is like a line into a reservoir of resources that summon your creative power to dare. That is the thing; the most important thing. As usual in this era of your life, you continue to struggle with the confidence issues that have deep roots into your family history. You may think of this in terms of what your parents and other relatives did to you. Instead, I suggest you think in terms of what life did to them – especially your mother and her mother. If you look there, you are likely to make significant progress getting to the root of your struggle with self-acceptance and self-forgiveness. In our time, we are taught to blame the father for all the ills of the family and of society. I am not suggesting you blame your mother for anything, but rather understand what she went through.

Then consider her mother. This may have a feeling of opening up rooms that have been sealed from your awareness. Once you start, you will slowly remember things (events, emotions, things said) that you knew as a child and forgot as an adult. The key here is to remember, in the most calm and objective way possible: without the judgments, and with focus on established facts and observations. Gradually, your situation will shift.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 19)

You’re entering a best-of-all-worlds situation as Jupiter and Chiron complete a planetary pattern long in the making. Before I get into the details, I would remind you that Pluto in your sign is the prime mover; the central axis on which all the other astrology of our era turns. For you, it’s driving your evolutionary growth in a time when spiritual advancement and self-actualization have never been under such persistent attack. This is both intentional by individuals and a result of the collective psychic and technological environment. In the midst of this onslaught you have one essential necessity, which is to remain committed to being true to yourself. Then, you will be able to take advantage of the circumstances that form around you; you will have a strong enough inner core for them to be meaningful. The most recent development is that Chiron has entered your 4th place, Taurus. This

is where you’re really an earth sign and not an air sign. It is easy to forego and forget this, in a time when the forests are being consumed for the sake of data centers and farms are becoming solar farms. Next up is Jupiter enters your 7th house of relationships and partnerships. This takes place on June 30 and reaches its first major peak on July 20 as Jupiter opposes Pluto. This is a significant point of contact for you; a place where you will have the ability to both see yourself accurately and align with your purpose. Take each step gently.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)

You learn differently than other people do, and this fact is now illuminated by the square of your ruling planet Jupiter, soon to be in Leo, to Pisces-friendly Chiron (newly arrived in Taurus). The two are in a 90-degree aspect, which will be short-lived and therefore represents an opening or opportunity – not an extended process. But this is happening in two solid, fixed signs that form the backbone of the zodiac. This aspect has leverage and it will teach you something about yourself. And if you apply what you know, you are likely to get a positive result. You learn from the morph of ideas and experience. If you have not made the discovery yet, both writing about something and also speaking about it are some of the most effective ways for you to condense and focus your learning process. Both are forms of teaching that require focusing on the basic elements of any subject or skill. Many factors are working for you right now. It is your ability to take

Math Puzzle Solution

By Anne Cotter Moses

Two Possible solutions:

98-76+54+3+21

9-8+76-5+4+3+21

complicated ideas and make them simple enough for others to understand that’s one of your best assets. The digital age is brutal in its disrespect for acquired and experimental knowledge. The little chit- chat window is presumed to be an all-seeing and all-knowing modern deity. This is obviously repugnant, though the better news is, you embody actual learning and actual teaching. I would remind you of one of my favorite Fritz Perls quotes: “Learning is discovering that something is possible.”



With Wand and Shawl - Poetry

Continued from Front Page

Grass and Stars

We listen to the voice
that says grass and stars
the voice that knows perfectly
how to describe luminescence.

We wait patiently on
the foothold of March
to see early crocus
and daffodils pushing
through earth’s cold skin.

We remember soft slippers
await us at the foot of the bed.

The moon and sun rise again
and again in the eternal blanket of heaven
as we apply balm to wounds
and salve to worn skin.

We know in our hearts
the universe has cycles
unknown and known.

We trust the voice of goodness
and grace to prevail when our hopes
falter then rise again like high tide.

– Margaret Roncone

Song of Summer Solstice

Do not weep when the Sun will seem to be receding soon
Sing to this longest day of the year and its eternal dawn

Sing to the Summer, that vast expanse of blue above green
And to the way that Time slows down at the top of its wheel

Lop-sided with gravity every six months, leaning in now
We turn our face towards or away from such strong light

Sing to its warmth this noon and to the cold bite wading toes feel
In oozing mud and stinking kelp before finding smooth pebbles

Sing of rock broken to stone and tumbled into shining gems
Awaiting those who roam the shores hunting for treasure

Sing of purple-shelled mussels and spiral-ridged clam domes
A briny stew for low-country lovers of chowder

Or broken open on driftwood and dark piers
A repast for grey gulls or fisher hawks, wheeling

And circling, loudly calling to us, like our children
At the edge of the earth, while we lie on heated sand

Breathing in the soft salt air and sharpness of bare skin
Sing to our children, crying for us to come down, come down

Come down to the beckoning breakers and get in, get in
Sing before they swim away to their long-legged futures

~ Lynn Carrigan



The Weeper at the Wake, Part 1

By S.E. Reid

Editor’s Note: Ferris Island is “located right at the elbow where Puget Sound meets the Salish Sea,” with “some strange hidden corners and a very unusual history.” Enjoy this tale of an island similar in many ways to what we Islanders like to speak of as our own “Old Vashon.” For more Ferris Island tales, visit: <http://talebones.substack.com>.

The Fishmaid’s Wake squatted on the Port Salish wharf, its neon sign blinking in the darkness, drawing the usual Friday night clientele like moths to a flame.

The dive bar was packed, mostly with the island’s commercial fishermen along with a handful of curious tourists. The smell of cigarettes lingered in the air from people smoking right outside the doors and windows – no one enforced the 20-foot rule here – and the old jukebox choked out “Spirit In The Sky” to an uncaring crowd, spilling out into the night where it echoed over the waves.

In the corner booth, Caroline traced swirls in the condensation on her beer glass, stealing glances at the short, sharp hallway nearby where the door marked EMPLOYEES ONLY stood. She had been nursing her drink for almost an hour, keeping an eye on the owner of the tavern, Ezekiel Shy, as he passed to and fro behind the bar, making small talk with the regulars and filling shouted orders.

Zeke – no one called him Ezekiel to his face – was a giant, well over six and a half feet tall, with the tattooed arms of a former sailor and the silvery hair and beard of an aging warrior. In the glow of the beer logos behind him he evoked a sort of alien gravitas.

He may have been getting up there in years, but there was nothing elderly about his eyesight; Caroline

knew that if she got caught, he could end her career.

Thankfully, Caroline was blessed with a journalist’s patience and waiting suited her just fine, watching the ebb and flow of drinkers approach and then leave the bar.

But her luck struck swiftly, and her moment arrived when a gaggle of college girls approached the bar in a chattering crowd, lining up to give their orders, the old-timers giving them ornery looks as they shuffled and nudged each other. Zeke would be occupied for a while.

Caroline rose, shouldered her purse, and walked with casual purpose toward the hallway. She pushed open the EMPLOYEES ONLY door, shutting it quickly behind her, then paused for a moment to listen.

There was no rush of pursuing footsteps, no upraised shouts of anger. As far as she could tell, she had made her way in, unseen.

Caroline looked around. She stood on a landing. There was a bare bulb overhead and a flight of stairs leading down into the Wake’s ancient cellar.

Nowhere to go but down.

The stairs creaked under Caroline’s sneakers, and a blast of cold, earthy air rose to meet her as she descended. On the way down, she opened her purse and pulled out Scully, her trusty digital camera, turning it on with a cheerful chime.

At the bottom of the stairs, Caroline paused. Another dim bulb hung from the low ceiling, the glow desperately reaching for the shadowy corners of the cellar and not quite managing to touch them. Whatever renovation work the tavern had undergone over the years did not extend to this original part of the building. The stone floor was littered with kegs and crates and shelves of cleaning supplies, all the ephemera of managing a respectable drinking

establishment. The sound of the crowd upstairs was distant, like hearing the sounds of a party through a radio underwater. It was a lonely place, a tomb of stone.

Caroline sat on the bottom step, resting Scully on her lap.

“So,” she said, her voice falling strangely flat in the thick-walled cellar. “Is anyone here? I’m not here to hurt you. I just want to say hello.”

Caroline waited. Her eyes began to adjust to the dim light, and she tried to listen for any sound over the muffled din from upstairs. But all was still, breathless.

Then, a quiet sound, like the slight turn of a bare foot on stone.

Caroline froze, listening.

The sound rose to a slow shuffling in the dark, footsteps moving between the shelves just outside of the circle of light. A wooden thunking, like knuckles passing along the oaken barrels, a rippling sound of fingertips tapping on the steel kegs.

A sighing breath.

The temperature in the already-cool cellar dropped a handful of degrees, and goose-pimples rose on Caroline’s arms.

Her hands trembled, but she waited. Not yet.

Right at the edge of the bulb’s furtive glow, a shape began to materialize, like a mist or a vapor rising from the floor. The air rippled. Caroline blinked to make sure that she wasn’t seeing things.

But she wasn’t.

Slowly, afraid to break the spell, Caroline lifted Scully’s viewfinder to her eye. Trusting the camera to do the work, she tapped the shutter about a dozen times, watching the cloudy shape blur and coalesce into the form of a person, a woman.

For a moment, the shape hung there, suspended beside the kegs and

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barrels, bare feet inches from the floor. There was no sound except the digital shutter-click of the camera.

And then – as though disappointed by Caroline’s presence – the apparition silently vanished into the dark.

Caroline lowered the camera and stood up. Her heart was racing, but she couldn’t help but bark a shocked laugh.

“Thank you, thank you,” she whispered, exhilarated. “Gorgeous.”

No time to look at the photos; she needed to get out of there before someone found her out. Caroline took the stairs two at a time on her way up, pushing open the door, shoving Scully halfway into her bag.

She stepped straight into the broad chest of Zeke Shy.

To be continued

Plant roses and lavender, for luck.



Fall in love
whenever you can.

~ Alice Hoffman